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ABSTRACT

The Doctor of Arts degree has aroused interest both as a means to improve the graduate preparation of college teachers and as an alternative to the research orientation attributed to the Ph.D. degree. The Association of American Colleges therefore appointed a special committee to advise its Commission on Institutional Affairs on the implications of this new advanced degree. Committee findings show that, at present, conditions do not enhance the immediate prospects for the D.A. nor do they encourage a long-range commitment to this alternative; rather the committee believes that there remains enough flexibility within the Ph.D. program to achieve improved preparation for college teaching. (HS)

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PREPARATION OF COLLEGE TEACHERS

Improvement of college teaching has long been a major concern of the Association of American Colleges. In cooperation with the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States the Association has sponsored two conferences on the preparation of college teachers, the latest of which was supported by the National Science Foundation and devoted to graduate preparation of scientists for undergraduate teaching.

The Association has also sponsored in cooperation with the AAUP the two-year Carnegie-financed Project to Improve College Teaching. This project has resulted in several conferences and significant publications on such topics as faculty career development and the evaluation of college teaching.

In November 1970, the AAC Commission on Institutional Affairs appointed a committee to evaluate proposed Doctor of Arts degree programs as a means for the further improvement of college teaching. The report of that committee was received and adopted by the Commission. The AAC Board of Directors reviewed the report in November 1971 and commended it to the serious consideration of the educational community. In approving this report the Board again urges that all members of the higher education community continue to strive for the improvement of college teaching and toward this end actively support efforts within existing degree programs to prepare graduate students for college teaching.

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The Need

The committee recognizes and shares the concern for improved college teaching which led the Council of Graduate Schools and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities to propose and develop guidelines for the Doctor of Arts degree. Certainly college teaching, both in four-year liberal arts colleges and community colleges, demands fresh and imaginative treatment.

Those who aspire to become college teachers need ample opportunity to learn systematically about the problems and techniques involved in teaching. But the committee found itself unable to concur in all the criticisms directed against the Ph.D. as the degree still commonly regarded as the most appropriate for those intending to teach at the collegiate level. Rather the committee believes that opportunities to prepare for college teaching should be included in programs leading to the Ph.D.

We are not alone in this view. At a recent conference more than 150 University of California professors formally resolved "that the necessary support be provided to establish programs that will offer students instruction and superviser experience in teaching as a part of their graduate or professional edcuation."* We are pleased to find that the graduate faculty of a distinguished university agrees with us that efforts to improve teaching should be included in Ph.D. programs.

In considering whether the D.A. might be a better way of preparing college teachers, the committee found little assurance that the proposed programs will achieve this goal. For many years, the Ph.D. has represented a level of achievement which few other degrees have successfully matched. If the D.A. is not implicitly a superior degree, and its proponents do not claim that it is, colleges and universities are likely to persist in ranking it as an inferior degree. At the same time, the better students will enter Ph.D. programs so as to keep open as many employment options as possible. Our understanding of the Doctor of Arts programs suggests that D. A. recipients will not enjoy as much flexibility in this respect as those who have the Ph.D.

Furthermore, the committee could not ignore market conditions. It sensed no enthusiasm among liberal arts colleges to employ D.A. graduates, so long as well qualified and experienced Ph.D.'s are available. Stated in its most muted form, this conclusion assumes that there is still a demonstrable relationship between scholarly concern and continuing intellectual curiosity, even when publication may not be the consequence. The committee found no evidence, in short, which permitted it to assume that D.A. graduates would find a favorable reception however meritorious their preparation. In any case, if many institutions can be expected to give preference to the Ph.D. holder, it would be manifestly inconsiderate to encourage young graduate students to pursue a D.A. so long as the number of available teachers exceeds the immediate demand.

Perhaps community colleges may find the D.A. an appropriate degree, but past experience suggests that two-year institutions are more interested in attracting the teachers with a master's degree and some special training in community college education.

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*The twenty-sixth All University Faculty Conference of the University of California was held on the Irvine campus March 23-25, 1971. The conference was devoted to discussions of the future of graduate and professional education.

Finally, the eminent universities of this country have an obligation to continue research as well as to prepare professional teachers. It seems unlikely that such universities offering D.A. programs will regard them as comparable to the Ph.D. Once again, it is not simply a matter of tradition; it is a recognition that these universities may choose to emphasize the improvement of the Ph.D. in preference to the creation of new programs.

Conclusions

The cumulative effect of these considerations so bluntly stated led the committee to regard the implementation of Doctor of Arts programs as hazardous. At present, conditions do not enhance the immediate prospects for the D.A. nor do they encourage a long-range commitment to this alternative.

Rather the committee believes that there remains enough flexibility within the Ph.D. program to achieve the improved preparation for teaching to which the D.A. aspires. Students considering teaching in liberal arts colleges in particular may find it preferable to retain the options represented in the Ph.D.

No one denies the need for perceptive and sensitive teaching in our colleges and universities, particularly at the undergraduate level. AAC has taken several steps including co-sponsorship of the Project to Improve College Teaching toward the fulfillment of the need. The committee applauds these efforts.

But universities too must share this commitment to good teaching. The discovery and dissemination of knowledge are central to the university. The results of research must be transmitted to those who do not already know them. Without good teaching the potential for further research will be seriously impaired. In this sense teaching is of the first importance in the university.

Therefore the committee urges those universities offering the Ph.D. to recognize the need for better college and university teaching by providing graduate students new opportunities to acquire teaching sensitivity while fulfilling the other requirements for the degree. The committee urges that a formal introduction to teaching be made an integral part of the Ph.D. program. Greater flexibility in dissertation topics might further assist in disarming critics and in providing imaginative alternatives to prospective college teachers. An evaluation of graduate instruction would help in setting the example for those who subsequently engage in college teaching. It need not detract from pure research.

Similarly, colleges may wish to consider internships which would provide a direct feedback to universities as to the appropriateness of their efforts to develop able instructors. The committee sensed that too frequently graduate departments express little interest in their former students once they have entered the teaching profession. The college and the graduate

school have too great a stake in the educational enterprise not to share a continuing concern for teaching performance. The reward system in colleges should take account of teaching performance, and the graduate school should recognize the importance of this professional function.

As changes in instruction crowd in upon the teaching profession, the demands for versatility and acumen will grow. The committee concluded that the Ph.D. can respond to these pressures for change in ways which proponents of the D.A. rightly encourage. If such an assumption is valid, the present situation warrants concentrating our efforts on improving the Ph.D. in preference to encouraging the creation of an alternate degree which may fare poorly in the present higher education economy.

Bibliography

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3. Council of Graduate Schools, "The Doctor of Arts Degree," March 1970.

4. Council of Graduate Schools, "Supplemental Statement on the Doctor of Arts Degree, 1972," December 1971.

5. American Association of State Colleges and Universities, "The D.A. Degree - A Proposal for Guidelines," February 1970.

6. Association of American Colleges, "Report on Preparation of College Teachers," December 1971. (This report will be published in the March 1972 issue of Liberal Education.)

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December 21, 1971

Dear Colleague:

As you know, the AAC has had a long and continuing interest in the improvement of college teaching. The recently concluded Project to Improve College Teaching is our latest and most extensive effort in this area. You have already received several publications generated by this project and a final report will be published in the spring.

Adequate preparation of the college teacher is, of course, an important precondition for good teaching. It is increasingly recognized that many graduating Ph.D.'s are ill-prepared to carry out their teaching responsibilities. A recent AAC-CGS conference and report dealt with this problem in the disciplines of mathematics and sciences and recommended a number of significant reforms in graduate programs.*

Some believe that adequate reform of the Ph.D. is unlikely. They advocate a parallel Doctor of Arts degree as preparation for undergraduate college teaching. Initial and supplemental statements on the D.A. were published by the Council of Graduate Schools dated 1970 and 1972. In February 1970 the American Association of State Colleges and Universities also offered proposed guidelines for the D.A. Subsequently, the Carnegie Corporation awarded grants to 10 universities for the development of D.A. programs. In October 1970 AAC participated with several other associations in the CGS sponsored Wingspread Conference on the Doctor of Arts Degree.

Since the AAC represents colleges and universities who are prime potential employers of D.A. graduates, our Commission on Institutional Affairs has also carefully studied these proposed D.A. programs. With concurrence of the Board of Directors, the Commission offers to the membership the enclosed report.

With kindest regards,

Sincerely yours,

Frederic W. Ness

Frederic W. Ness
President

Enclosures

*See the attached bibliography of statements and reports mentioned in this letter.